

ARIZONA VETERAN'S RESEARCH COUNCIL

FINAL REPORT TO GOVERNOR JANET NAPOLITANO

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Veteran's Research Council was tasked with making recommendation aimed at improving support services for veterans throughout the State of Arizona. Five areas were specifically identified for review. They include homeless veterans, women veterans, rural veterans, disabled veterans, and Guard and Reserve issues.

There are well over a half a million veterans in the State of Arizona. The United States Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) estimates the current number of veterans to be approximately 545,000. This figure is expected to remain relatively steady through 2010. Beyond 2010, it is expected the state's veteran population will begin to decline. The anticipated veteran population in Arizona for fiscal year 2030, is 408,000. The only veteran population that is projected to grow between now and 2030 is the female veteran population. Projections show an anticipated increase in women veterans from nearly 44,000 in fiscal year 2007 to just over 53,000 in fiscal year 2030. As a percentage of veterans, the women veterans population will grow from 8% to just over 13% in that period.

Recommendations

By area, the research Council makes the following recommendations:

Homeless Veterans

1. Establish a Low-Income Housing Tax credit for veteran's permanent housing.
2. Give state procurement preferences for all procurements related to homeless services to organizations that provide transitional housing for homeless veterans as part of a proposed project.

Women Veterans

1. Identify women veterans, continue the current efforts to develop a comprehensive "Arizona Veteran and Military" registry.
2. Prepare and distribute to women veterans and information packet which includes contact information of the VA, ADVS, useful websites, and information pertaining to employment transition and women's health issues.
3. Appoint women veteran advocates within the Governor's office of Children, Youth, and Families; the Arizona Department of Housing, the Arizona Department of Health Services, and the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

Rural Veterans

1. Provide transportation assistance for rural veterans to get them to medical appointments.
2. Deploy ADVS Veteran Benefits Counselors (VBC) to the more rural parts of the state. This should be done through a combination of fixed offices in additional locations and through traveling offices on a routine basis.

Disabled Veterans

1. Similar to recommendation number 2 under Rural Veterans, the committee recommends the deployment of ADVS VBCs to additional locations to reduce the amount of travel for disabled veterans to get assistance. Specifically, the use of mobile offices such as a van or motor home to reach remote veterans is recommended.
2. Disabled veterans should be granted a property tax exemption in a percent equal to the percentage of disability awarded by the VA.
3. Service connected disabled veteran owned small businesses should receive a preference for state contracts. It is recommended that the state follow the federal government's example of setting aside three percent of state contracts.

Guard and Reserve

1. Modify ARS 41-608.04, The Military Family Relief Fund, to include as beneficiaries, service members and families of those who entered the military from Arizona, but are stationed outside Arizona. Further, reserve component troops from Arizona should be covered. Finally, the committee should be exempt from the open meeting laws and applications for assistance should be exempted from disclosure under the state public records law.
2. ARS 26-167, which prohibits employment discrimination against members of the Arizona National Guard should be amended to extend its protection to all members of the reserve components.
3. ARS 26-168, which protects the employment rights of members of the Arizona National Guard, should be amended to include protection for all members of the reserve components.
4. ARS 15-1808, which provides tuition waivers for members of the Arizona National Guard who received the Purple Heart Medal should be amended to provide tuition waivers for all service members from Arizona who receive the Purple Heart.
5. ARS 43-1079.01 and 43-1167.01 allow tax credits of \$1,000 to employers of deployed members of the Arizona National Guard. The Council recommends these statutes be amended to provide the same tax benefit to all Arizona employers who

employ any deployed reserve component members.

Miscellaneous Recommendations

1. A comprehensive directory of organizations offering services to veterans should be developed, maintained, and published.
2. The state should substantially increase its state income tax exemption of military retired pay to attract more veterans to Arizona.
3. Limited gambling licenses should be available to Veterans Service Organizations to provide a source of revenue to support veterans programs. Specifically, recommended are licenses to permit “pull tab” games. Texas and Ohio permit these types of games in veteran’s halls/posts.

Funding Priorities

Recognizing that not all recommendations having a fiscal impact can be acted on all at once, the Council recommends the following priority:

1. Funding for the transportation of rural veterans to medical appointments.
2. Tax credits for Arizona employers of deployed service members.
3. Property tax exemptions based on the percentage of rated disabilities.
4. Tuition waivers for all Arizona Purple Heart recipients.
5. Low-Income Housing Tax Credit for homeless veteran housing programs.
6. Increased tax exemption for military retired pay.